

**Self-Improvement and Teen Magazines:  
A Matter of Fashion and Beauty**

A content analysis of *Sassy*, *Seventeen* and *YM*—teen magazines for  
adolescent females.

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The School of Journalism and Mass Communication  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
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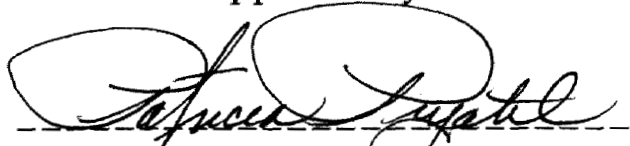
by Catherine M. Staub  
August 1997

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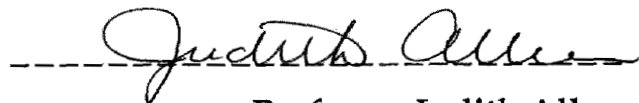
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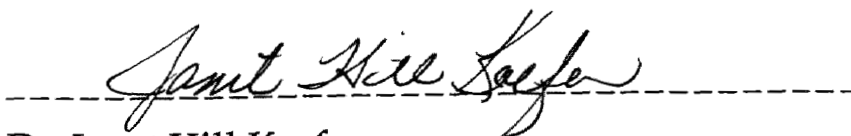
**Approved by Committee:**

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**Professor Patricia Prijatel, Chair**

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Judith Allen', written over a horizontal dashed line.

**Professor Judith Allen**

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Janet Hill Keefer', written over a horizontal dashed line.

**Dr. Janet Hill Keefer  
Dean, School of Journalism and Mass Communication**

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## Self-Improvement and Teen Magazines: A Matter of Fashion and Beauty

An abstract of a Thesis by  
Catherine M. Staub  
August 1997  
Drake University  
Advisor: Professor Patricia Prijatel

This research is a content analysis of three teen magazines: *Sassy*, *Seventeen* and *YM*. It replicates an earlier study by Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner, to determine if teen magazines targeting a young, female audience still promote self-improvement through fashion and physical beautification.

The data was collected from ten issues each of *Seventeen*, *Sassy* and *YM*. Issues selected for *Seventeen* and *YM* were published during the time period from June 1996 through July 1997. The issues selected for *Sassy* were published during the time period from December 1995 through November 1996, *Sassy*'s last issue. Articles, advertisements and photographs were coded according to the coding scheme developed by Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner to facilitate a comparison of results.

Results of the content analysis and comparison with results from the earlier study show that the three teen magazines studied do still promote self-improvement through fashion and physical beautification. The content analysis of photography in each of the magazines shows each of the magazines studied have made progress in representing a multi-cultural, multi-racial population by including pictures of more non-white models.

Further study of teen magazines is needed to determine the impact of the magazines' messages on readers. Further studies might explore a possible correlation between teen magazine readership and eating disorders or body-image distortion. Further research might also consider uses and gratifications theory to help explain why teen magazines are read, and if the magazines are fulfilling reader needs.

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## Chapter I. Introduction

Several studies discussed in the literature review below look at advertisements and their portrayals of women. Most studies show models' weights have decreased over the years, and advertisements continue to portray women as alluring, decorative objects, in traditional roles. But we need to look beyond advertising to study magazine articles and photography for their messages to women and girls. Magazines are an important medium for study because they have reinforced society's beauty ideals for women, and in the last 30 years, have advanced standards for weight loss, cellulite minimization, muscle definition and, recently, achievement of the "waif-look" as essential for women. Diet articles and advertisements proclaiming the methods by which women can achieve the proper look seem to be a mainstay of women's magazines.

More recently, researchers have studied the relation between media exposure to beauty messages and eating disorders, using college-age women as subjects. Researchers have found a correlation between the media beauty messages that often cause women to overestimate their own body sizes, and dieting, which can develop into an eating disorder. Medical information about anorexia and bulimia conveys the side effects of such disorders and the percentages of patients who never recover from these disorders.

Despite the value of studies that used college women as subjects, sociological and psychological research shows that adolescence is the time

when a person's identity is formed most extensively (Josselson, 1990). Self-image problems may be created much earlier than college. Limited research also shows many grade school and high school-age girls diet and are concerned about being over-weight, even if at normal, or below normal, weight for age and height. Studies need to analyze teen magazines and use adolescents as subjects, to determine the impact of magazine messages at the age of identity formation. In 1988, Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner completed a content analysis of *Sassy*, *Seventeen* and *Young Miss* magazines with this rationale:

We argue that it is important to examine this (teen magazines) segment of media in light of both consumer psychology and issues of adolescent socialization ... These issues draw attention to the social messages and value implications that adolescents may derive from magazine content, the relevance of content to identity achievement, adolescents' subjective sense of magazine influence, and their objective comprehension of article content (Evans, 1988, 101).

The researchers state that the study of the potential media influence of teen magazines "has been both limited in volume and narrow in focus" (1988, 100). In addition, they mention that as of 1988 there had been no published



work about content patterns of popular teen magazines and teens' use of and response to the content (Evans, 1988).<sup>1</sup>

This study will replicate Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner's 1988 content analysis of *Sassy*, *Seventeen* and *Young Miss* magazines and compare the results with the earlier study to determine if teen magazines are continuing to promote self-improvement through fashion and physical beautification. The study should contribute to the groundwork for further studies of the impact of magazines on adolescent girls' self-image. In particular, it could contribute to insights regarding girls' self-image and beauty ideas and eating disorders.

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<sup>1</sup> Since 1988 the following studies about content patterns of teen magazines and teens' use of and response to the content have been published:

Bolla, Patricia A. (1990). Media images of women and leisure: An analysis of magazine advertisements, 1964-87. *Leisure Studies*, 9, 3, 241-252.

Currie, Dawn H. (1997). Decoding femininity: Advertisements and their teenage readers. *Gender and Society*, 11, 4, 453-477.

Currie, Dawn H. (1994). "Going green": Mythologies of consumption in adolescent magazines. *Youth and Society*, 26, 1, 92-117.

Finders, Margaret J. (1996). Queens and teen zines: Early adolescent females reading their way toward adulthood. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 27, 1, 71-89.

Guillen, Eileen O. and Susan I. Barr. (1994). Nutrition, dieting and fitness messages in a magazine for adolescent women, 1970-1990. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 15, 6, 464-472.

Peirce, Kate. (1990). A feminist theoretical perspective on the socialization of teenage girls through *Seventeen* magazine. *Sex Roles*, 23, 9-10, 491-500.

Peirce, Kate. (1993). Socialization of teenage girls through teen-magazine fiction: The making of a new woman or an old lady? *Sex Roles*, 29, 1-2, 59-68.

Rangell, Leo. (1990). *Seventeen*: The approach to the portal of adult life. In Robert A. Nemiroff and Calvin A. Colarusso (Eds.), *New dimensions in adult development*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

## Chapter II. Literature Review

### Magazine Images of Women: 1950s - 1990s

Despite historical changes in the definitions of beauty, within a society at a given time there is general agreement as to who or what is considered beautiful. As a result of the continuing fluctuations in societal standards for beauty, "being a woman involves constantly adjusting one's own image to fit time and place in an ever-changing game of images" (Winship, 1987, p. 101). Americans and Europeans tend to agree with their media as to what is considered appealing and what is not (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986).

In the 1950s, television showed standardized images of how Americans should live. Magazines reinforced those images of a lifestyle of "relentless consumption" in which having the right clothes, appliances, and products were the means for being a good wife, keeping the house neat, and satisfying a hard-working husband (Ehrenreich & English, 1978, p. 256).

By the 1960s, media images reinforced the rise in popularity and status of the single girl who had a job that required her to look sexy in fashions from the latest *Cosmo* or *Glamour*. This new image changed media's portrayal of the full-time housewife; she no longer had prestige, but was portrayed as an "object of pity" (Ehrenreich & English, 1978, p. 261). The move away from positive media portrayals of housewives reinforced a new slimmer ideal for women.

Consistent magazine portrayal of thin models introduced the fitness craze in the 1970s. Women were told they needed a healthy, thin body to improve their chances for satisfying sex and work (MacSween, 1993). From March 1969 to February 1970, there were only 20 exercise articles in popular press, but by March 1978 to February 1979, the number of exercise articles in popular press shot up to 60 (Seid, 1989). The introduction of cellulite as a concern for women introduced still more stress about weight, because even a naturally thin person might not be attractive because of cellulite traces. The numbers for what constituted healthy body-fat percentages dipped and “less is more” became the new slogan promoted by the media (Seid, 1989, p. 179). Even medical recommendations were turned into “popular gospel” by the mass media as lower consumption of saturated fats and meat was promoted (Seid, 1989, p. 194). A passion for exercise was created, and fatness was deemed evidence of moral failure. This reinforced the idea that not only was it unattractive to be overweight, but a woman could not be a good person if she were too heavy.

Models during the 1970s were displayed in magazines as impossible standards for true beauty. Since models were extremely thin and judged to be perfect, how could readers be expected to still aspire to achieve the model look, rather than giving up because the challenge appeared impossible? Beginning in the 1970s, models were placed in more realistic settings and clothes, so it seemed more women could identify with them. Many of the models’ clothes, however, were pushing the boundaries of modesty, covering

little of the models' bodies. Such clothes further necessitated concentrating on weight loss (Seid, 1989).

The 1980s pushed the fitness and diet craze to a new extreme. Now a thin body was not enough; muscles were proclaimed popular by fashion magazines. "Beauty, fitness, health, strength" were used interchangeably to emphasize the new direction for women (Seid, 1989). The implicit message of the new muscular-but-trim look is that women always need to do more work to achieve beauty. For marketers and producers, an ever-changing look assures a demand for new products and services designed to help women achieve beauty because marketers realize that women "will buy more things if they are kept in the self-hating, ever-failing, hungry, and sexually insecure state of being aspiring 'beauties'" (Wolf, 1991, p. 66).

Today, despite women's advancements in the political and business worlds, standards for women's beauty are as strict as ever. One only needs to look at the cover models on virtually any women's magazine to see that women are supposed to be impossibly beautiful and dangerously thin. Health and fitness are important aspects of life for most people in the 1990s, yet the focus of women's health and fitness still appears to be diets to lose weight and exercise to slim the body. Reader's Guide lists 188 exercise articles for January to December 1995 compared to only 20 in a 12 month span from 1969 to 70.

## **Magazine Advertisement Portrayals of Women**

Advertisements help to create a standardized image of socially acceptable styles, trends and products since, with advertisements, "lasting impressions are made, and deeply ingrained patterns and meanings are carried" (Millum, 1975, p.12). Whipple and Courtney (1985) determined that for advertisements to be most effective, the gender of the model should match the image of the product held by product users; the role setting for the model should be appropriate for product use; modern depictions are generally more effective than traditional depictions, and realistic, natural roles are more effective than stereotyped depictions. Despite Whipple and Courtney's findings, a study of magazine advertisements from the early 1950s, early 1960s and early 1970s illustrates that there were limited images of women portrayed in the advertisements. Women were shown most frequently as social people, functioning as alluring, decorative and traditional (Sexton & Haberman, 1974). Despite hopes that magazine advertisement portrayals of women as professionals have increased since the 1970s, a study of 871 magazine advertisements one-half page or larger from 1994 - 1995 shows that stereotypes of women as decorative objects or entertainers continued (Cornelius, Thompson, Melanson & Zelaya, 1996). These portrayals continued despite career women being the highest percentage of magazine readers (Bartos, 1982).

Courtney and Whipple (1983) contend that four conclusions can be drawn from the portrayals of women in advertisements: The woman's place

is in the home; women do not make important decisions or do important things; women are dependent and need men's protection; men regard women primarily as sexual objects.

Another concern with advertisements is the lack of representation of minority models. Shepherd (1980) found hardly any representation of black women in magazine ads, despite black women constituting the largest minority in the United States. Those who were shown were entertainers rather than business professionals.

### **Media Images of Women**

In America, thinness often is a "metaphor for beauty and goodness" (Attie & Brooks-Gunn, 1987, p. 221). Women selected by the media as ideally-shaped models are consistently thinner than norms for women in the general population (Attie & Brooks-Gunn, 1987). A 1986 study of *Vogue* and *Ladies Home Journal* by Silverstein, Peterson and Perdue confirms this, finding slimmer women and more diet articles in recent years (Thompson, 1990). A 1980 study by Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz and Thompson found that since 1960, *Playboy* centerfolds' and Miss America contestants' average weights decreased while the average weight for the general population increased (Attie & Brooks-Gunn, 1987; Thompson, 1990). The Miss America pageant contestant study collected data from the contestants and winners from 1959 to 1978. In addition to contestants' average weights decreasing, the study also found that the winners, since 1970, have weighed significantly less than other

contestants (Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz & Thompson, 1980). A 1989 study by Spillman found subjects linked more positive characteristics to ectomorphs, thin body types, than in earlier studies. Ectomorphs are rated as being most sexually appealing, having the most dates, exercising the most and being most knowledgeable about nutrition. Earlier studies had found more positive traits associated with the mesomorph, a medium-build body type (Spillman & Everington, 1989).

Ultra-thin models can affect others' self-image because most women are not naturally extremely thin. Even models are expected to diet to dangerously low weights. In a 1993 *People Weekly* interview, supermodels Kim Alexis, Carol Alt and Beverly Johnson reported that each was told to lose weight to get modeling jobs. Alexis tried fad diets and starving herself for four days. Johnson had a thyroid problem she attributes to all the diets she tried. Alt said she ate only one salad a night for a year until she was diagnosed with hypoglycemia. Johnson states that in the modeling industry there is a belief that "clothes look better on a hanger, so you have to look like a hanger" (Sporkin, 1993, p.83).

The fashion industry also uses adolescent models made up to look older (Body Image and Self-Esteem, 1987). Mature women are not going to be able to achieve the same body shape as an adolescent girl, yet that is the ideal espoused by some magazines. If adolescent girls are featured in women's magazines, what are the models like in teen magazines, and what messages are they sending to readers?

Many women turn to drastic measures such as extreme diets and fanatical exercise programs to achieve model proportions. An analysis of weight and diet content in five American women's magazines, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *McCall's*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Glamour* and *Seventeen*, from 1950 through 1983 reveals an increase in the number of articles about weight loss and reference to weight loss on magazine covers. Such emphasis was coupled with an apparent decrease in the weight of models in advertisements and a decrease in the use of overweight models. In addition, the proportion of all articles about diets and the proportion of all headlines about diets increased significantly (Snow & Harris, 1986).

In another survey of six popular women's magazines, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue*, *McCall's*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Woman's Day*, researchers found that the number of diet-related articles increased 70 percent from the early 1960s to the late 1970s (Attie & Brooks-Gunn, 1987) and there was a "significant increase in the number of diet articles" from 1970 to 1980 (Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz & Thompson, 1980). Yet another study found that for a 12 month span from 1968 to 1969 there were 25 diet articles listed in Reader's Guide, while for 12 months from 1978 to 1979 there were 88 diet articles, not including regular feature diet columns (Seid, 1989). In 1995-96, that number has leaped to 299 diet articles. It would be difficult to find a woman's magazine without one.

Figure 1 compares the number of diet articles and advertisements Anderson and DiDomenico found in 10 popular women's magazines in the



fall of 1987 and diet articles and advertisements the researcher found in the same magazines for December 1996. In seven of the 10 magazines, the number of diet articles and advertisements increased from 1987 to 1996. The ten magazines from 1996 include 36 more articles and advertisements than the 1987 magazines (Anderson & DiDomenico, 1992).

Figure 1. Diet articles and advertisements in 1987 and 1996.

Women's Magazine	Diet Articles and Ads in One Issue Fall 1987	Diet Articles and Ads in One Issue December 1996
<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	12	9
<i>Good Housekeeping</i>	12	10
<i>Women's Day</i>	2	14
<i>McCall's</i>	2	11
<i>Glamour</i>	5	6
<i>Family Circle</i>	4	6
<i>Better Homes and Gardens</i>	5	12
<i>Ladies' Home Journal</i>	10	12
<i>Redbook</i>	4	14
<i>Seventeen</i>	0	0

Researchers have also found that the diet focus is definitely targeted to women, rather than men. Andersen and DiDomenico looked at 10 popular women's magazines and 10 popular men's magazines to compare the number of diet and body-shape articles included in each. To be classified as a "diet" piece one or more of the following words needed to appear in the title, subtitle or anywhere in the ad: diet, weight reduction, fewer, reduced, low calorie, or lose weight. To be classified as a "shape" piece, one or more of the following words needed to appear in the title, subtitle or anywhere in the ad: shape, fitness, weightlifting, body building or toning muscles. The 10 women's magazines contained a total of 56 such diet ads or articles and only 20 shape articles or ads. The 10 men's magazines, conversely, included a total of only 5 diet ads or articles and 17 shape ads or articles. Researchers conclude it is possible the difference in focus persuades women to be concerned with weight (Andersen & DiDomenico, 1992).

These studies suggest that a prevalent message in women's magazines is that women must change their bodies to match the models' shapes and sizes. Clearly this message targets women's self-images since it suggests women are not good enough as they are, but can improve themselves by attaining acceptable weights. To further reinforce beauty ideals, the media provide cultural stereotypes that portray obese people as "lazy, sloppy, and dirty," and slim people as beautiful, "friendly, and intelligent" (Nagel & Jones, 1992, p. 109). Subjects in a study by Spillman and Everington (1989) label endomorphs— heavy body types— as the sloppiest dressers, under

stress, depressed, working menial jobs and conforming to others' wishes. These stereotypes are said to pressure women because not only must women be thin to be attractive, but also thin to be good.

Magazine editorial and advertiser messages to women are said to suggest that women can take control of their bodies through weight loss (Spitzack, 1990; Seid, 1989). Ironically, women may lose control through such messages because they suggest women will be judged by their looks rather than their actions and achievements, and women can only attempt to control their looks with assistance from the fashion and beauty industries. Marilyn Lawrence looks at the issue of control and believes that women need to feel in control of their bodies because of women's relative social powerlessness (MacSween, 1993). Women have made advances in other areas that provided "high self-esteem, a sense of effectiveness, activity, courage, and clarity of mind" (Wolf, 1991, p. 188). The inability to succeed in looking like magazine models may thwart women's successes in other areas (Wolf, 1991). Lerner, Orlos and Knapp found that "females' self-concepts appeared more strongly related to their attitudes about their bodies' physical attractiveness than its effectiveness" (Myers & Biocca, 1992, p. 112). Even girls were often found to define achievement in terms of success in attracting the opposite sex (Hsu, 1990).

The psychological stress that results from striving for a weight or shape that simply can not be acquired is another problem with dieting (Attie & Brooks-Gunn, 1987). Snow and Harris found that diet-related advertisements

suggest "weight loss is easy, even fun" (1986, p. 211). In an analysis of 37 issues of popular women's magazines, only 11 percent of the articles about dieting were found to be pessimistic regarding weight loss success (Parham, King, Bedell & Martersteck, 1985, p. 19). Little attention was given to long-term maintenance of weight loss, and virtually no mention was made of failure rates for long-term control of weight (Parham, King, Bedell & Martersteck, 1985). Yet for 98 percent of dieters weight loss is short term (Wolf, 1991).

Just as serious as psychological stress from dieting is the physical stress endured by the body when women lose and regain weight again and again (Spitzack, 1990). Weight Watchers, for example, is proud to claim more than 25 million customers in the last 33 years, yet Weight Watchers only has 2 million lifetime members. Lifetime members are those individuals who have reached their weight loss goals and maintained that weight. This suggests the vast majority of Weight Watchers customers have not maintained their weight loss. If women were not "subject to social pressure towards thinness they would attain a weight that was 'natural' to them by listening to their body tell them what and how much food to eat" (MacSween, 1993, p. 83). Control is again thought to be taken from women, this time to be placed in the hands of the weight loss and beauty industries.

Two severe effects of beauty standards are the eating disorders anorexia and bulimia. These disorders have been studied by physicians, psychiatrists, historians and women's studies experts, perhaps suggesting the pervasive

impact of eating disorders. Both anorexia and bulimia are most common among young, Caucasian, upper socio-economic women in a competitive environment that emphasizes slimness; the same people targeted by the majority of women's magazines (Hsu, 1990; Bell, 1985). When suffering from anorexia, women force themselves to lack an appetite and lose at least 25 percent of their original body weight. They have a distorted attitude toward eating, food and weight. Bell (1985) found that besides severe, life-threatening weight loss, anorexics can also suffer amenorrhea (absence of a period), lanugo (covering of downy hair), bradycardia (slow heartbeat) and vomiting. A bulimic achieves weight loss through bingeing and purging. Often anorexics will also suffer from bulimia (Hsu, 1990). Joan Brumberg (1988) has found that 5 to 10 percent of all American girls and women are anorexics, and Dr. Charles Murkovsky, an eating diseases specialist, believes that 20 percent of American college women binge and purge on a regular basis (Wolf, 1991). Mahowald believes both socially defined standards for the feminine ideal and an individual desire to avoid "the appearance and consequences of mature womanhood" are explanations that account for many cases of anorexia (1992, p. 233). Part of the treatment for overcoming eating disorders is rejection of gender stereotypes (Mahowald, 1992).

### **Impact on Women's Self-Image**

Extensive studies have been conducted on the beauty images media present to women, particularly concerning models' weight and shape, and the

impact of these images on readers. Primarily these studies have looked at magazines and used college women as subjects. Recent studies have linked magazine beauty images with subjects' poor self-image and increased dieting that sometimes leads to eating disorders. The studies discussed here illustrate the impact magazines have on adult readers. Little work has been done to study the impact of magazines on adolescents. The studies discussed below provide models for future studies of teen magazines and adolescent readers.

The studies discussed below suggest women believe they must alter their appearances to meet magazine editorial and advertising standards of beauty, success and appeal. These women experience a negative self-image because they believe they are not acceptable as they are; they must conform to society's ideals to be acceptable. Several studies provide evidence of a relationship between media images and poor self-image, dieting and eating disorders.

A study of 238 female undergraduates assessed the relation of media exposure to eating disorder symptoms. Subjects completed a 10 page questionnaire that included a media exposure scale, gender-role endorsement questions from Spence, Helmreich and Strapp's Attitudes Toward Women Scale and Doyle and Moore's Attitudes Toward the Male Role Scale, ideal-body stereotype internalization, body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptomatology test from Garner, Olmsted and Polivy's Body Satisfaction subscale of the Eating Disorders Inventory and Garner, Olmsted, Bohr and Garfinkel's Eating Attitudes Test. Results showed statistically significant

direct effects of media exposure on eating disorder symptomatology and gender-role endorsement. These in turn, are related to ideal-body stereotype internalization which leads to body dissatisfaction and finally, eating pathology. The findings support beliefs that the "media-portrayed thin ideal is related to eating pathology and suggests that women may directly model disordered eating behavior presented in the media" (Stice, Schupak-Neuberg & Shaw, 1994, p. 839).

A study of 162 female undergraduates from a large midwestern university used the BULIT test to identify bulimic symptoms in subjects. After completing the test questions, subjects were placed in one of four groups. The first group was shown slides of thin fashion models, the second, average models, the third, oversized models, and the fourth, the control group, had no exposure. Results show the group observing the thin models exhibited lower self-esteem than the other groups. Subject weight satisfaction also increased linearly with the increased weight of models viewed, with the greatest personal satisfaction expressed by the group exposed to the oversized model slides. Subjects also reported they experienced the "greatest amount of pressure to be thin from media, followed by peers, and finally, family" (Irving, 1990).

Kelson, in a study of 245 female undergraduates, reports that social influences are "believed to have a strong effect on women's perceptions of the importance of beauty characteristics in their lives" (1990, 281). The study found a positive correlation between body-consciousness and body-

satisfaction (Kelson, 1990). Public body-consciousness is "attention focused on external aspects of one's body which are visible to others" (Kelson, 1990, p. 282). Private body-consciousness refers to "attention focused on the functioning of one's body, ie. agility and strength" (Kelson, 1990, p. 282). Lerner, Orlos and Knapp found that "females' self-concepts appeared more strongly related to their attitudes about their bodies' physical attractiveness than its effectiveness" (Myers & Biocca, 1992, p. 112).

Heinberg administered the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire to 194 female undergraduates at the University of South Florida to "assess women's recognition and acceptance of societally sanctioned standards of appearance" (Heinberg, Thompson & Stormer, 1995, p. 81). Results show an acknowledgment of societal emphasis on appearance and an internalization and acceptance of these standards. A second test using the same methodology indicated that "an internalization of societal pressures regarding appearance may be a key feature of body dissatisfaction and eating disturbance" (Heinberg, Thompson & Stormer, 1995, p. 87).

Women are said to be susceptible to messages about weight reduction to the extent that at least 75 percent of people with normal or below normal weight believe they need to lose a few pounds (Seid, 1989). One out of every two women is reported to be on a diet "most of the time" and three out of four feel naturally prone to being overweight (Freedman, 1986). In another study, Thompson found that more than 95 percent of women who do not



have eating disorders still overestimate body size by about 25 percent (Myers & Biocca, 1992).

### **Limited Teen Research**

If college-age women are strongly influenced by media messages, what is the impact of magazine messages on adolescents? Dorr expresses particular concern with the young audience of teen magazines because of the impressionable nature of children and adolescents (Kubey, 1990). Since only limited research has been completed on adolescent and teen use of magazines (Waltzer, 1987; Bush & Burnett, 1987) further study in this area is needed.

Teens make or influence billions of dollars in purchases each year, and the brands they select as teens often continue as their choice brands as adults. Besides brand choice, a major influence of advertisements is one's self-concept in the areas of consumer roles, occupational roles and sex roles. While advertisements can help teens become smart consumers, ads can also cause teens to develop materialistic attitudes. Advertisements' stereotypes of women as housewives and mothers is correlated to heavy media users holding traditional, nonegalitarian family-role views (Moschis, 1982).

A number of studies look at television influence on viewers and conclude that children who are heavy television viewers give more traditional sex-typed test answers than light viewers (Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Liebert & Sprafkin, 1988). A study of 483 children and adolescents, ages 9 to 15, found that after television viewing, voluntary reading of any material

was the next most frequent media activity (Kubey & Larson, 1990). Since reading is such a frequent activity for adolescents, similar studies need to be conducted to determine the role of magazines in influencing readers.

Research completed by Shaw and Kemeny also suggests the need for further study of teen magazine messages. The researchers used a sample of 627 high school students to study techniques for promoting fitness participation using an emphasis on the "slim ideal" (1989, 677). The researchers developed a series of fitness promotion posters with a model and text. One of three messages was used: "Fitness Today: For a Slimmer Tomorrow," "Fitness Today: For a Healthier Tomorrow" or "Fitness Today: For a More Active Tomorrow." One of three models was used: 15 to 20 pounds below average weight; normal weight; or 15 to 20 pounds above average weight, based on the 1983 Metropolitan Life Insurance weight table. While the slim model was the most effective model in encouraging students to participate in fitness activities, the slimness message was least effective. Researchers believe that an "overt emphasis on body image may lead to self-consciousness and fear of social rejection" (Shaw & Kemeny, 1989, p. 677).

Children, too, are susceptible to media influence and have shown preference for athletic or lean builds and distaste for heavy builds (Attie & Brooks-Gunn, 1987). This can cause adolescents to be upset with their own appearance and diet as a result. In a 1979 study of 1,915 ninth through twelfth grade students, respondents reported that physical appearance is their most worrisome problem (Page & Allen, 1995). Even as early as elementary school,

subjects of another study exhibited concerns about dieting and body weight. Of the 175 female subjects, 55 percent had been on a diet at some point, and 63 percent of those who had dieted had been younger than 12 at the time of their first diet (Moreno & Thelen, 1995).

An analysis of magazines geared to adolescent females may help explain the preoccupation with weight loss among children. A study of 10 issues each of *Sassy*, *Seventeen* and *Young Miss* magazines from January 1988 to March 1989 found the theme of self-improvement was dominant. The problem with this theme is that the magazines suggest self-improvement should be achieved with fashion and physical beautification. The articles supported the notion that "slim is in" and the "road to happiness is attracting males ... by way of physical beautification" (Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner, 1991, pp. 110-111). Even girls were often found to define achievement in terms of success in attracting the opposite sex. By the time girls are 7 to 8 years old, "their concepts about physical attractiveness are very similar to those of older adolescents" (Hsu, 1990, p. 84).

Such studies may explain the behaviors of teenage girls who want to look just like the models they see in magazines. Andrea Tebay, 16, said, "My friends and I were looking at pictures of Kate [Moss]. Gosh, we thought we had to look like Cindy Crawford, and now we have to look like this!" (Ague, 1993, p. 74). Kate Moss represents the "waif" look, while Cindy Crawford is muscular. Henrick, a dietitian and counselor at Wilkins Center for Eating

Disorders in Greenwich, Connecticut, reports that an anorexic brought in a picture of Kate Moss as her ideal (Ague, 1993).

In an interview with Jane Pauley for a 1990 edition of NBC's *Real Life*, 9 and 10 year old girls commented on being thin and beautiful. "Your life will be fuller, I think." "I usually like to look like people on TV." "It's the people in the magazines and the models....It kind of says: 'You should look like us because we make money.'" (Perimenis, 1991, p. 58).

### **Identity Formation During Adolescence**

Psychology and sociology provide theories as to the significance of magazines' impact on adolescents and illustrate the value of further study of teen magazine because of their potential impact on readers. These theories focus on the development of the individual's identity during adolescence. Adolescent girls look to outside influences for guidance in developing what they consider to be appropriate attitudes, ideals and beliefs. Teen magazines are one source of influence for girls and therefore deserve further study to determine the type of messages being sent to girls, and the impact these messages are having.

Perspectives from a variety of theorists are provided below as an overview of the concept of identity-formation during adolescence. Experts offer several definitions of identity, but do agree that one of the main tasks of adolescence is identity formation (Josselson, 1990). Josselson defines identity as "the stable, consistent and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands

for in the world" (1990, p. 10) Marcia defines identity as "a self-structure—an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history" (1980, p. 159). Adolescence is a transitional time in identity formation. The young person is forming an identity in terms of vocational direction, relationships and ideological stance (Marcia, 1980).

From Freud's perspective, adolescence is a time for adjustment in terms of body image, sexual attitudes and family relationships. William James divided the self into three parts: the material self, the social self and the spiritual self. The material self comprises one's body, possessions, family and home. The social self concerns the recognition one gets from others. And the spiritual self is the inner or subjective being. An adolescent's body image is extremely critical in terms of the material self (Offer, Ostrov, Howard & Atkinson, 1988).

Because identity is dynamic, the less developed the individual's identity, the more the person will rely on external sources to evaluate oneself (Marcia, 1980). Bandura and other social-learning theorists believe that adolescent development is a product of social interactions. Adolescents learn from imitating models and the feedback they receive in social situations, particularly from peers (Offer, Ostrov, Howard & Atkinson, 1988). Erikson has found that adolescents are "preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared to what they feel they are" (1968, p. 128). This age group also looks for ideas and people to have faith in to help establish an identity (Erikson, 1968). This need for favorable evaluation and acceptance

from others is what can make magazines so influential for adolescents.

Adolescents are forming personal identities, and, in doing so, seeking information to help themselves make choices. This might include reading about possible choices and talking with friends (Waterman, 1985).

Girls are particularly dependent on external reference for acceptance when establishing identities (Steiner-Adair, 1990). For males, adolescence is a time for independent development and separation; for females, adolescence is a time of connection and relationships (Stern, 1990). Adolescent females are socialized not to accept bodily imperfections, and to accept dieting as socially acceptable because "the culture encourages girls to struggle to change their bodies to fit a narrowly defined beauty ideal" (Steiner-Adair, 1990, p.167). Therefore, "there may be sociocultural influences that make today's young females vulnerable to problems related to dieting and eating at this stage in the life cycle." (Steiner-Adair, 1990, 162).

Researchers found 67 percent of boys, and only 52 percent of girls are proud of their bodies. At the same time, 38 percent of girls and only 27 percent of boys feel ugly and unattractive. In the same study, girls reported a higher degree of social awareness and commitment to others than boys (Offer, Ostrov, Howard & Atkinson, 1988).

The Offer Self-Image Questionnaire is a self-descriptive personality test that assesses the adjustment of 13-19 year old males and females (Offer, Ostrov & Howard, 1984). The test is designed to measure impulse control, emotional tone, body image, social relations, morals, vocational and

educational goals, sexual attitudes and behavior, family relations, mastery of external world, psychopathology and superior adjustment. Test results show adolescent girls have significantly more negative feelings about their moods than boys. Girls were sadder, lonelier and easier to hurt than boys. The girls also reported being ashamed of their bodies and feeling ugly and unattractive. They felt less positive about their body changes than the boys. Boys were also found to be more autonomous, less other-directed and less concerned about attitude than girls. The girls also reported being more attached to relatives and friends. Overall conclusions from the test show that normal, middle class adolescents accept the values of the larger society (Offer, Ostrov & Howard, 1984).

### **Mass Communication Theories**

Several mass communication theories help to explain the power of magazine messages. The sociocultural model suggests that social and cultural variables play a part in the way people adopt new ideas. These variables are "important sources from which individuals gain definitions of appropriate behavior in group context" (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1975, p. 247). Even if the sociocultural cues are contrary to what the individual would do alone, mass-communicated messages can provide individuals with new ideas that seem to be group-supported ideas or beliefs (Lewin, 1958; Sherif, 1958). Groups then provide social frameworks for members. The persuasive messages delivered by magazines and advertisers provide the appearance of

group consensus on issues such as beauty standards and diets. The images reinforce social rewards and social approval for those who adopt the goals of the communicator.

Giving even more power to the ideas from the sociocultural model are group membership effects. Sherif (1965) presents four characteristics of a group:

- (a) The group situation may bring about modifications in the experience and behavior of every individual in it.
- (b) When the performance of a task is in question, the output of the individual members may vary.
- (c) The individual in the group or crowd situation acts as a member of the group. His experience and behavior are determined by the nature of his membership in it.
- (d) The formation of crowds may depend on the relaxation of old norms, and may also result in establishing new norms.

A group can also be defined as "(two or more persons) involving long-standing, intimate, face-to-face association" (Severin & Tankard, 1992, p. 181). Magazine readers of approximately the same age form a loosely-knit primary group. As Scott Ward (1980) points out, parental influence decreases and peer influence increases with age for responses to advertising, purchase acts, and drug attitudes and use. Ellul (1965), in his study of propaganda, recognized that the individual is never considered as individual, but instead, looked at for what she has in common with others in a group. As part of a mass, an



individual's defenses are weakened and reactions are easier to provoke. John C. Turner (1982) states that intragroup relations are strengthened by the perceived similarity of members, the mutual attraction between members, the mutual esteem, the emotional empathy and the attitudinal and behavioral uniformity of members. All of these are present for the teen magazine readers. The importance of peer acceptance for teens provides an environment of mutual attraction and mutual esteem, as well as attitudinal and behavioral conformity. Turner also recognizes that being part of an ingroup is equated with high status, which in turn leads to a positive self-identity.

Cultivation theory offers additional support for the power of images promoted by magazines. Cultivation suggests that mass media teach a "common worldview, common roles and common values" (Severin & Tankard, 1992, p. 249). Generally, cultivation theory is applied to heavy television viewers who believe the real world is similar to the world portrayed on television, with more violence and risk than actually occurs (Severin & Tankard, 1992). It is arguable, however, that cultivation theory also applies to issues of women's beauty portrayal in magazines. A study by Larkoff and Scherr found that viewers and readers see television and magazines as representing real people, and fail to realize what goes into making the models look the way they do (Thompson, 1990). When virtually all magazine images of women are flawless and ultra-thin, a common view is developed that all women should be as thin and flawless as the models.

Cultivation theory suggests people will believe that since the models were able to achieve such a look, it must be possible for real women to do the same.

Propaganda techniques used in beauty and fashion industry advertisements are another reason for the successful promotion of a standard images for women. Glittering generalities, which associate a product with a virtue word, are often used to promote new face creams or anti-cellulite gels (Severin & Tankard, 1992). The products are labeled "scientific," "anti-wrinkle," "age-defying" or "impeccable." Women do not stop to examine the products and ingredients to determine if the product can actually accomplish all it seems to promise. Instead, women are excited by the new possibilities offered by the product. Transfer, which "carries the authority, sanction, and prestige of something respected and revered over to something else in order to make the latter more acceptable" (Severin & Tankard, 1992) is used when products claim to be physician-formulated, for example. There may be nothing medically sound about the way the product is supposed to work, but association with a physician prevents many consumers from further studying the product to determine what benefits, if any, it really carries. Testimonials, which make use of a respected person to promote a product (Severin & Tankard, 1992), are used in the fashion and beauty industry since beautiful, well-recognized models sport the newest fashions and make-up colors. Magazine cover models are used to make a connection with readers; the model's gaze holds the reader's attention. This connection convinces the reader that she has something in common with the model, and although the

model looks perfect, with the magazine's help, the reader can create the same look (Winship, 1987). Finally, the band wagon approach, that suggests that "everybody is doing it" (Severin & Tankard, 1992, p. 103), is utilized by magazines as they project standardized images that suggest to women that anyone who wants to be beautiful or successful must look a certain way, and use certain products, services, and routines to achieve the look. It is difficult for women to ignore or resist such theoretically sound promotional techniques, particularly since beauty images are so ingrained in our culture.

These same theories can be applied to the messages in teen magazines.

Personal enhancement appeals, social status appeals, product usage portrayals and competitive product appeals all affect children's and adolescents' self-concepts (Young, 1990; Rossiter, 1980). A study by Rossiter demonstrated a 42 percent increase in the popularity of a particular brand of cookie after children viewed an ad that showed a child gaining friends by sharing cookies. Although this study was conducted with children younger than teen magazine readers, research shows that the older the children, the better the response to social status appeals because peer acceptance becomes a more important issue with age (Rossiter, 1980).

Linking self-concepts to advertised products is an effective persuasive method. Milton Rokeach discusses how beliefs can be changed. He maintains that Type E beliefs, psychologically inconsequential beliefs, are easier to change than other, more important, beliefs. Rokeach goes on to say that people generally resist changes in all beliefs, so Type E beliefs are often

linked to other, more important, beliefs . Type B- beliefs are negative primitive beliefs about self-conceptions. Advertisers, for example, use fear of rejection to stir up Type B- beliefs. Many magazine advertisements link product beliefs to Type B- self-conceptions because the ads emphasize the themes of being popular and attractive. According to Rokeach's theory, readers will link a fear of being rejected to lack of having or using the product, and therefore will be more likely to change their Type E beliefs about product or brand preference and need, and as a result, buy the product (1972).

These mass communication theories demonstrate the potential power teen magazines have to influence readers.

### Chapter III. Research Question

Are teen magazines, represented by *Sassy*, *Seventeen* and *YM* magazines, promoting self-improvement through fashion and physical beautification?

## Chapter IV. Methodology

This study is a replication of the 1988 study by Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner, and methodology follows the format (summarized below) designed by those researchers. Selection of *Seventeen*, *Sassy* and YM, formerly *Young Miss*, magazines matches the choices by the first researchers. *Seventeen* magazine is targeted to the 13- to 24- year-old age range. In 1988, *Seventeen* was the circulation rate leader for teen magazines, with an annual circulation of approximately 1,850,000. *Seventeen* had a circulation of 1,950,000, according to the 1997 edition of *Ulrich's International Periodical Directory* (1997). YM is targeted to junior high and high school-age females. In 1988, *Young Miss* had an annual circulation of almost 800,000 copies. Now titled YM, the magazine has a circulation of 1,829,515 according to *Ulrich's International Periodical Directory* (1997).

*Sassy*, a new publication in 1988, had a first-year circulation of approximately 437,000 copies. It targeted modern adolescents, ages 14 to 19, with a median readership age of 16.3. *Sassy* is no longer published. In November, 1996, *Sassy* was folded into *'Teen* magazine.

Ten issues each of *Seventeen*, *Sassy* and YM were selected for analysis, providing 30 issues for analysis. The issues selected for *Seventeen* and YM were published during the time period from June 1996 through July 1997. The issues selected for *Sassy* were published during the time period from December 1995 through November 1996, *Sassy's* last issue.

## Coding Articles

The coding scheme for the content analysis matches the coding scheme used by Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner. Articles were first categorized as general category or specific feature. Next, general category articles were subcategorized as beauty, fashion, entertainment and celebrity, health, and recurrent columns such as horoscopes.

Specific feature articles were subcategorized based on criteria from adolescent identity status assessment literature. Experts believe adolescence is a transitional time in identity formation. The young person is forming an identity in terms of vocational direction, relationships and ideological stance (Marcia, 1980). Adolescents are adjusting in terms of body image, sexual attitudes and family relationships. They are developing attitudes about material goods, social situations and spiritual beliefs (Offer, Ostrov, Howard and Atkinson, 1988).

These approaches to adolescent identity formation led to the development of the following subcategories for feature articles: 1. education and career development, 2. ideology and ethics (moral-ethical, religious and political), 3. interpersonal relations (family, peers, dating and sexuality), 4. self-esteem, and 5. special issues of adolescence (substance abuse, eating disorders, depression, suicide).

Article frequency and page length for each were recorded to determine content-pattern volume by subcategory and percentage of article space for each subcategory in relation to total page length for each magazine.

## Coding Advertisements

Advertisements were also coded. Advertisement content was coded as beauty and cosmetics, fashion and clothing, feminine hygiene, health and weight loss, education and career, music and entertainment, and personal services.

Advertisement frequency was also recorded. The size of each advertisement was recorded as full-page, half-page, two-column, one-column or "partial" for smaller advertisements. Ten partial advertisements equaled a full page when figuring the total number of advertisement pages.

For each magazine, figures were recorded for total number of ad pages for each category for each magazine, total number of ad pages per magazine, and percentage of advertisement space in relation to total page length.

## Coding Photographs

All human photographic images in general articles, feature articles and advertisements were coded for subject ethnicity (white/non-white) and gender (female/male). For each magazine, the total number of models for each category and percentage of each category in relation to the total number of models for each magazine were calculated. Subject ethnicity was not divided into subcategories because of a lack of clear, distinct subgroups.

Information from the 1996-97 *Seventeen* and *YM* magazines, and the 1995-96 *Sassy* magazines, were then compared with the information gathered in the 1988 study.



Some results are presented in numerical and tabular form for ease of discussion and comparisons.

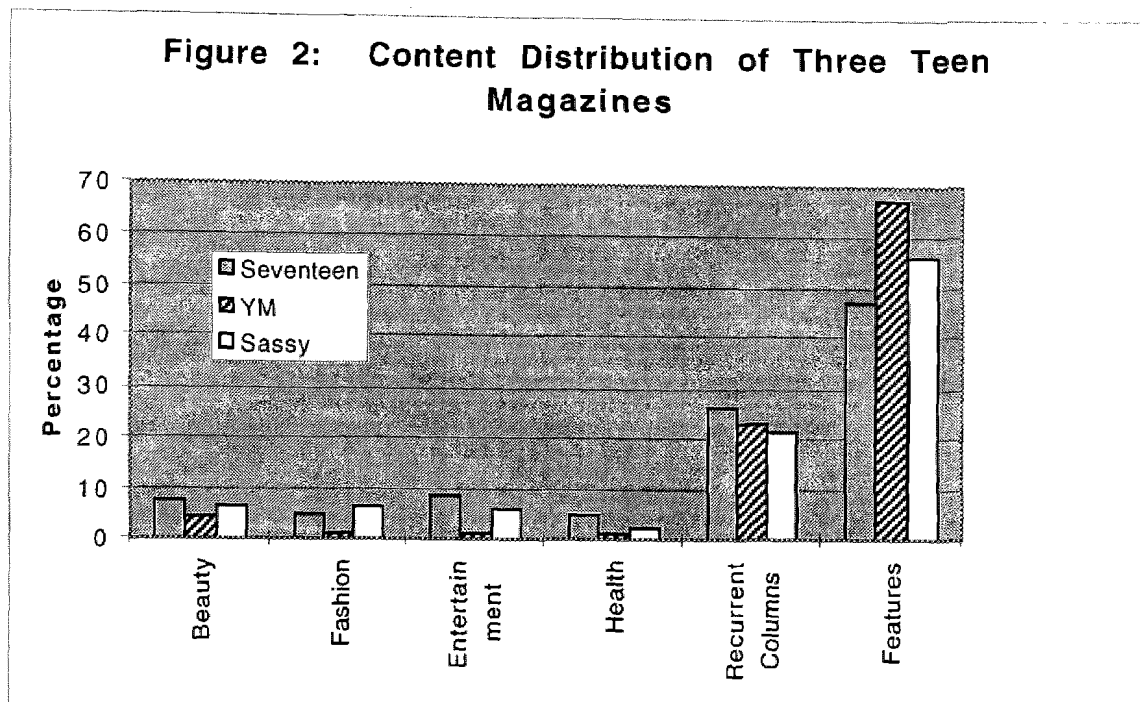
## Chapter V. Results

Results in this section parallel the coding sequence described in the methodology section, providing results for general category articles, specific feature articles, advertisements and photographs. The results from this 1997 study are compared with results obtained by Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner in their 1988 study. Throughout the results chapter, percentages are the mean percentage rounded to the nearest tenth.

### Magazine Article Content

Figure 2 illustrates the content distribution of the three teen magazines, *Sassy*, *Seventeen* and *YM*. For each magazine, the largest percentage of articles were features, followed by recurrent columns. Recurrent columns included such items as "back talk" (reader mail), "ask anything" (questions from readers), "guys", and "horoscope." In the 1988 study, fashion articles were the most dominant, while in magazines analyzed for the 1997 study, fashion, entertainment, and beauty general category articles each averaged less than 10 percent of the total pages of articles in the three magazines. Fashion and beauty topics, however, did play a major role in feature articles. But because feature articles were analyzed for identity-related themes, fashion and beauty features were categorized as "other" in feature article coding. As in the 1988 study, health issues still play a relatively minor role in each of the three publications, appearing an average of 5.1 % in

*Seventeen* magazine, and only 2.6% in *Sassy* and 1.5% in *YM*.

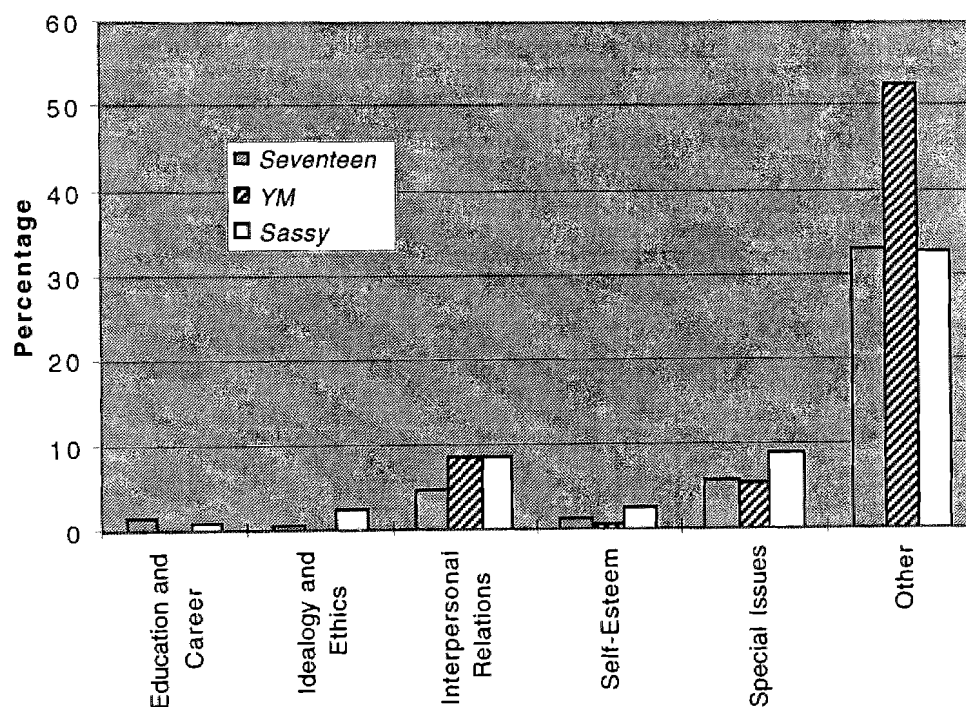


### Feature Article Themes

Feature articles were coded according to identity-related themes described in the methodology chapter, and, as illustrated in Figure 3, results are fairly consistent across the three magazines analyzed. Articles about interpersonal relations and special teen issues were the most common type of identity-related issue to be addressed in the magazines. Education and career, ideology and ethics, and self-esteem issues were addressed in fewer than 3% of the feature articles in any of the magazines. *YM* did not have any education and career, or ideology and ethics feature articles in the ten issues analyzed for this study.

The largest category of feature articles did not address identity-related issues, but focused on fashion, beauty, and entertainers and celebrities. Table I lists a sample of the article titles for each of the feature article categories.

**Figure 3: Feature Article Content Distribution of Three Teen Magazines**



**Table I: Illustrative Feature Article Titles From Three Teen Magazines By  
Identity Theme Category**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Title</b>
<b>Education and Career Development</b>	"No-Bummer Summer" ( <i>Seventeen</i> , May, 1997)
	"Whiz Kdz" ( <i>Sassy</i> , January, 1996)
<b>Ideology and Ethics</b>	"Sorrow, Hope, and Israel's Noa Ben Artzi-Pelosof" ( <i>Sassy</i> , September, 1996)
	"It's Who I Am" ( <i>Seventeen</i> , November, 1996)
<b>Interpersonal Relations</b>	"The Kissing File" ( <i>Seventeen</i> , April, 1997)
	"Romeo, Romeo, Get Real" ( <i>Sassy</i> , October, 1996)
	"Your Love Future" ( <i>YM</i> , December, 1996)
<b>Self-Esteem</b>	"Some Body to Love" ( <i>Sassy</i> , October, 1996)
	"This Fat Girl Thing" ( <i>Seventeen</i> , January, 1997)
	"My Body, My Enemy" ( <i>YM</i> , February, 1997)
<b>Special Issues of Identity</b>	"Our Best Friends Killed Themselves" ( <i>YM</i> , August, 1996)
	"I Started Drinking in the 3rd Grade" ( <i>Sassy</i> , October, 1996)
	"Dying Young" ( <i>Seventeen</i> , October, 1996)

## Advertisement Content

Figures 4 and 5 show results of the advertisement content analysis for the three magazines. Figure 4 illustrates the percentage of advertisements in each magazine to the total magazine space for each magazine. *Seventeen* has the highest average percentage of advertisements in relation to total magazine space at 50.4%. In 1988, *Seventeen* had an even higher percentage of advertisements in relation to total space at almost 57%. *YM* has 38.7% advertisements in relation to total space for the 1996-97 magazines analyzed. This figure is just slightly lower than the 1988 percentage for *Young Miss*. *Sassy* had the lowest percentage of ads to total magazine space in both the 1988 and 1997 study. For the 1996 magazines analyzed, *Sassy* had 26.3%, and in 1988 had 38%.

**Figure 4: Advertisement Space Allotment in Three Teen Magazines**

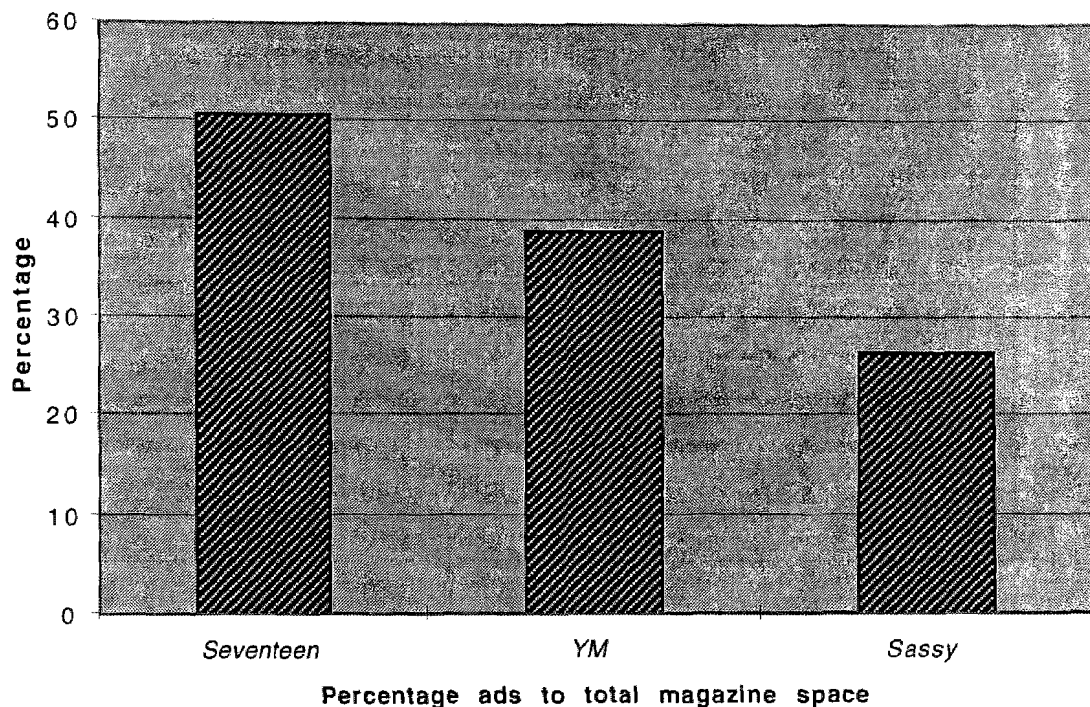
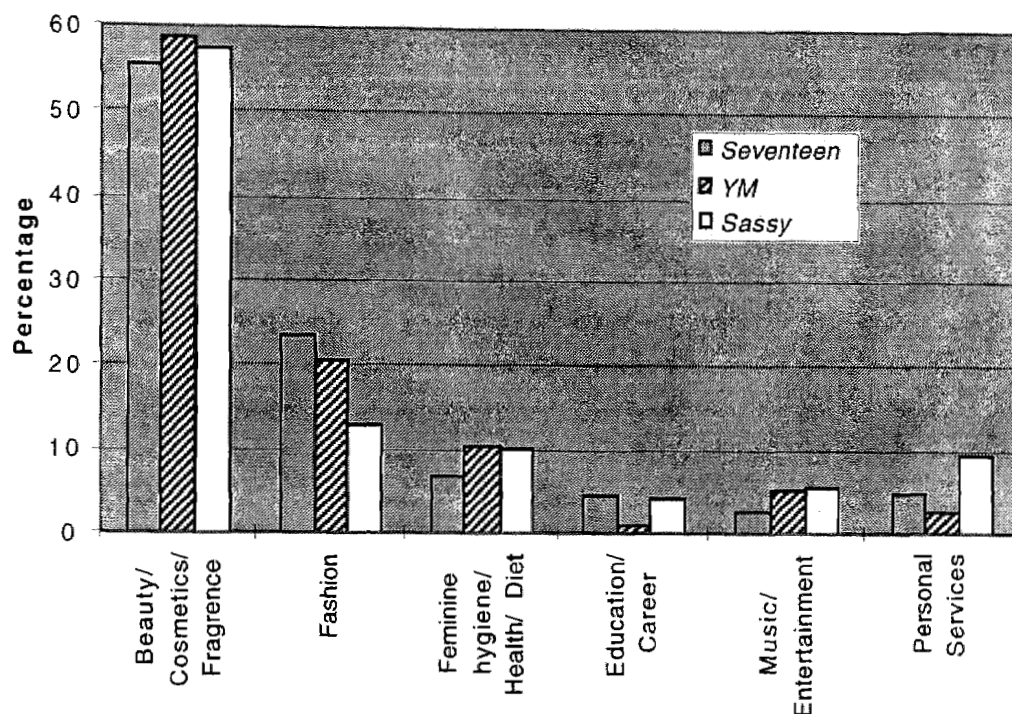


Figure 5 illustrates the advertising content patterns for the three magazines. Beauty, cosmetics and fragrance advertisements are the leading ad category in all three publications, with more than 55% of the ads in each magazine. Fashion advertisements followed, with 12.9% of the advertisements in *Sassy*, 20.8 % in *YM*, and 23.4% in *Seventeen*. Beauty advertisements were also the leading ad category in the 1988 study, with fashion advertisements following.

**Figure 5: Advertisement Content Distribution of Three Teen Magazines**



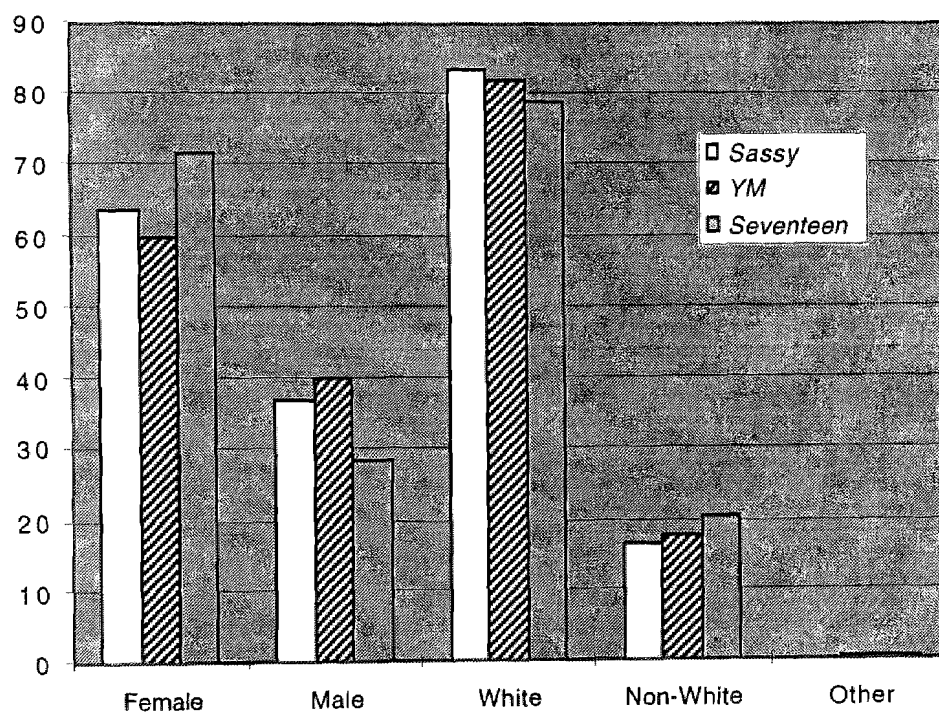
### Human Photographic Content

Figure 6 illustrates the human photographic content in the three publications. In all three magazines, white models and female models were the dominant categories, although YM averaged 40% males models. In the 1988 study, fewer than 30 % of the models were males in each of the three magazines. All three magazines included more non-white models in 1997 than in 1988. In addition to white or non-white, an "other" category for ethnic origin was added in the current study. There were several photographs in which the model's race could not be clearly determined. This



occurred with .4% of the models in YM and .2% of the models in *Seventeen*.

**Figure 6: Human Photographic Content by Gender and Ethnicity in Three Teen Magazines**



## Chapter VI. Discussion

In the 1988 study of *Seventeen*, *Sassy* and *YM*, Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner divided their discussion of the results of the study into the following areas: themes of self-improvement, themes of identity development and achievement, and bias for white models. The discussion of this study will address the same three areas. A statistical comparison is not provided because Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner do not provide statistics in their report, and attempts to query the original researchers were unsuccessful.

### Themes of Self-Improvement

In the 1988 study of *Seventeen*, *Sassy* and *YM*, Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner noted that "although ostensibly governed by the theme of self-improvement, these publications seem to approach the topic largely through fashion dressing and physical beautification, with some modest attention to guidance articles about normative problems in the interpersonal domain — mostly female-male relationships" (1991, p. 110). The results of this study suggest that not much has changed in the last 10 years in terms of teen magazine content.

The focus of most feature articles was not identity-related issues, but fashion trends and beauty products. Although adolescent girls are admittedly concerned with appearance and the opinions of friends and the opposite sex,

the attention given to these issues in the magazines analyzed sends a strong message about the importance of being beautiful and wearing the right clothes.

Advertisements are also still dominated by beauty and fashion ads that suggest with the right products and clothes, girls can be attractive enough to win the right boy. In fact, the percentage of beauty ads increased since the 1988 study. The limited number of education and career advertisements included in each magazine were dominated by modeling schools and modeling career information. Does this message lead adolescent girls to avoid considering some career choices? If readers are turning to these magazines for guidance, what message is being sent about acceptable careers for women? Do readers believe that all popular, successful girls have what it takes to be a model? A future study could look at the impact of education and career advertisements in magazines on reader self-image and career choice.

The magazines analyzed in this study also include a higher percentage of feminine hygiene, health and diet ads than the magazines analyzed in 1988. But the advertisements for health, feminine hygiene and diet still include blatant weight loss ads for weight loss camps and programs designed to slim girls so they can be popular enough to gain friends and male attention.

Weight loss programs are one of the biggest promoters of the beauty image. Cures for obesity are marketed by virtually anyone with business sense and an enticing cure. New and improved weight loss programs,

coupled with pressure from social standards for attractiveness, prevent girls and women from abandoning body concerns (Spitzack, 1990). Beauty is presented as attainable, if only the reader buys the right products, subscribes to the right services and joins the right clubs. There are always new, scientific products promoted to do what no other product could do. Targeting impressionable adolescent girls, the marketers of diets and weight loss programs are probably hoping to reach an audience of girls who are likely to become life-long dieters.

But are the weight loss messages really effective? In a study by Shaw and Kemeny, data suggest that advertisements based on the slim ideal may actually be ineffective and may have a negative impact on adolescent girls (1989). Girls believe they can never be as slim as the models, and therefore see themselves as less acceptable. Even ads that promote slimness and fitness being related may discourage girls from participating in fitness activities for fear of rejection or failure to live up to the slim standards they see essential to participation in the activity (Shaw & Kemeny, 1989).

Another problem with diets and weight loss systems are the potential dangers of such methods. Although women are beginning to demand more attention for women's health and medical issues, there also needs to be tighter control over diet pills and weight regulators. Many of these formulas can be very dangerous, but the hazards often go unreported. Dieting during adolescence is particularly problematic since the adolescent's body is developing so rapidly.

Interestingly, in each of the magazines analyzed for this study, there were a number of weight-related articles that discussed eating disorders and problems with society's focus on the slim ideal. These included articles such as, "Some Body to Love," "Too Much of a Good Thing," "Feeding the Pain," "This Fat Girl Thing," "The Body Trap," and "My Body, My Enemy."

Despite articles discussing problems associated with trying to achieve the "perfect" body, the basic message throughout the fashion and beauty articles, the advertisements, and the photographs is to create the body and the look that will win friends and boyfriends. How does such a conflicting message affect readers? Do readers pay more attention to articles warning them of the dangers of eating disorders and side effects of dieting, or are they more influenced by the other messages encouraging them to look just like models and wear popular clothes?

Of course, it is more profitable for advertisers and marketers if readers buy into the messages that they must have the right body, clothes, hair and make-up in order to be popular. Ever-changing, impossibly demanding standards for beauty create a climate of "relentless consumption" of products and services designed to assist girls and women in achieving their beauty goals (Ehrenreich & English, 1978, p. 256). "Mass media, most notably television and magazines, are pervaded by advertisements for slimming devices and formulas, designed to assist in efforts to reshape body boundaries" (Spitzack, 1990, p. 9). The body has become a commodity in America (Spitzack, 1990; MacSween, 1993). Advertisers and businesses

continue to promote beauty standards because beauty is such a profitable industry, bringing in \$33 billion a year for diet programs, \$20 billion a year in cosmetics, and \$300 million a year in cosmetic surgery (Wolf, 1991).

Where do teenage girls get health information? A study comparing established women's magazines and new women's magazines of the 1970s found that established magazines gave more overall coverage to women's health issues than new women's magazines. Neither established nor new women's magazines, however, gave much attention to serious health problems women actually experience (Weston & Ruggiero, 1985/86). The magazines analyzed for this study support that conclusion. At 5.1% of total articles in the magazine, *Seventeen* presented the most health information. That low percentage of magazine space hardly seems sufficient to discuss serious topics such as sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, drug use, healthy eating, exercise programs, and AIDS — all of which affect teenagers.

Safety issues are another area of increasing significance in our society that were basically ignored in the analyzed magazines. Sometimes women and girls are encouraged to join self-defense classes, and occasionally, after reporting crime stories, television reporters will remind viewers of basic safety tips. But how seriously do girls take these messages if they are omitted from their magazines? Date rape, abuse, sexual harassment, and incest are unfortunate realities for girls today. Should teen magazines be addressing these topics more frequently?

## Themes of Identity Development and Achievement

Little space in any of the three magazines analyzed for this study is devoted to identity-related feature articles. Most feature articles continue to promote the notion that teenage girls should focus on clothes and make-up. Since the majority of advertisers in *Seventeen*, *YM* and *Sassy* are marketing beauty products and clothing, are these advertisers affecting editorial content? Or do the editors believe readers are not interested in much more than fashion and make-up trends? The lack of space and time to run meaningful articles about important issues because of the focus on product-enhancing copy is problematic for teens' and women's magazines.

One of the dangers of the heavy influence of marketers in the fashion and beauty industry is a loss of expression in girls' and women's magazines. Advertisements in these magazines are generally strategically placed in relation to editorial copy. Clothing advertisements surround fashion spreads featuring clothes from the same designers. Make-up ads precede and follow features explaining exactly how to achieve the covergirl look, using the magazine sponsors' products (Winship, 1987; Steinem, 1996). In addition, these carefully placed ads are often advertorials which mimic the magazine's editorial pages, leading readers to believe they are not reading an advertisement, but the magazine itself. How perceptive are adolescent readers in discerning between advertisements and editorial copy? Is editorial copy promoting specific product brands, so that the editorial copy is functioning as advertising? Have advertorials become too realistic, confusing

the reader into believing the magazine, rather than the advertisers, is recommending the products? These questions pose an ethical problem.

The Magazine Publishers Association has set guidelines for advertorials, but since the MPA is a voluntary organization and not all magazines belong to it, these recommendations do not carry much weight (Gordon, Kittross & Reuss, 1996). In magazine editorial, beauty editors are not even able to tell the "whole truth about their advertisers' products" so "when you read about skin creams and holy oils, you are not reading free speech" (Wolf, 1991, p. 82). What can, or should, be done to regulate advertorials? Should more strict regulations be developed for teen magazines since those readers are more impressionable? Or would tougher restrictions simply be ignored, or challenged as restrictions to free speech?

Reuss, in *Controversies in Media Ethics*, questions the ethics of advertisers pressuring the mass media for special treatment. Magazine editorial department leaders regularly inform advertising sales staffs about upcoming editorial content so they can solicit advertising that matches editorial subjects. Gordon, Kittross and Reuss believe many readers "appreciate finding advertisements that complement the information contained in the articles they read" (1996, p. 271). But they question this practice, asking, "Ethically, are editorial briefings good business practice because they eventually serve readers, or unethical conflicts of interest?" (Gordon, Kittross & Reuss, 1996, p. 271).



Social responsibility and ethical issues must be addressed by teen magazines and magazine advertisers. Bok devotes an entire book, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*, to a discussion of lies (1989). Are magazines and advertisers lying to girls and women by promoting diets, cosmetics, clothes and cosmetic surgery that will never make the readers look just like the models they see in the magazines? Are magazines ethically responsible when writing editorial copy which praises new products simply to satisfy advertisers? Or are the magazines and advertisers justified because they are running businesses which must make profits in order to survive?

Although none of the magazines analyzed ran advertisements for tobacco products, the tobacco industry is a good example of how advertisers can influence editorial copy. In 1970, the year before cigarette advertising was banned on television, tobacco companies spent \$50 million on magazine advertisements. By 1974, tobacco companies were spending \$115 million on magazine ads. These huge expenditures seem to have influenced the way magazines treat smoking and its health hazards. In fact, in a 1989 study, Kessler found the only treatment of smoking-related health dangers was in brief news items (1989).

When Gloria Steinem of *Ms.* magazine attempted to publish *Ms.* without running the usual complementary copy promoting products advertised elsewhere in the magazine, she ran into numerous problems. Companies pulled product ads because they believed, in a woman's magazine, "the main function was to create a desire for products, teach how to use

products, and make products a crucial part of gaining social approval, pleasing a husband, and performing as a homemaker" (Steinem, 1996, p. 164). When *Ms.* magazine ran advertisements, the publication had an advertising policy that stated it would not run ads for harmful products or ads that are insulting to women. A study of advertising in *Ms.* magazine found that even with such a policy, the magazine ran ads for harmful products and ads that portrayed women as decorative, sex objects, or subordinate to men (Ferguson, Kreshel & Tinkham, 1990).

Since most magazines cannot break even from just the cover price of the magazine (Winship, 1987), the loss of advertisers presents serious troubles for a magazine. In 1989, for example, toiletries and cosmetic advertisement revenue offered \$650 million to magazines (Wolf, 1991). Reuss states, "the question here is whether it is right that only very strong and very determined media can withstand advertiser pressures" (Gordon, Kittross & Reuss, 1996, p. 268).

*Sassy* is an example of a magazine that could not withstand pressure from advertisers, despite an auspicious beginning. *Sassy* was launched in March of 1988, and within six months gained a circulation of over 400,000, making it one of the most successful magazine launches in the history of United States publishing. The magazine targeted 14- to 19-year-olds, with a median readership age of 16.3. *Sassy's* editorial staff was young — editor-in-chief Jane Pratt was only 25 — and wrote the magazine in the language teens used to talk to one another (Kaufman, 1988; Van Meter, 1989; Kelly, 1997).

Their style was labeled pajama-party journalism to describe the "liberal use of teen vernacular" and the "frequent chronicling of the *Sassy* staff's individual likes, dislikes, and personality quirks" (Kaufman, 1988, p. 86). Following the natural, right out-of-the-mouth editorial, *Sassy's* models looked natural and unmade-up. *Sassy* also presented an outspoken sexual tone. This tone, while extremely popular with readers, is what began *Sassy's* downfall (Kaufman, 1988; Van Meter, 1989; Kelly, 1997).

The article, "The Truth about Boys' Bodies," *Sassy*, April 1988, informed readers that the shape and size of a boy's fingers are not directly related to the shape and size of his penis. Jan Dawes, a Wabash, Indiana mother of three boys, objected to the magazine's contents. She wrote an article to *Citizen*, the monthly newsletter of Focus on the Family, a California group headed by conservative activist James Dobson. In the article Dawes stated *Sassy* was the most sexually provocative teen magazine ever published. The article encouraged readers to buy a copy of *Sassy* and if they were upset with what they read, to write a letter to Jane Pratt and the magazine's major advertisers, including Revlon, Noxell, Maybelline and Tambrands. Hundreds of letters poured into *Sassy's* offices and to advertising executives (Kaufman, 1988; Van Meter, 1989).

Meanwhile, Helen Barr, publisher of *Sassy* in 1988, had just wrapped up a huge advertising deal with a southern-based cosmetics company. The deal was worth an initial \$2 million, with a potential \$5 million more in the future. As Barr was on her way to the airport after working on the deal, she

received a call from the *Sassy* office advising her to get in touch with the cosmetics company. When she called the vice president of the company, he informed Barr that he had to pull all of his advertising with *Sassy* because of the letters he had received. The letter writers threatened store level boycotts if the company continued advertising in *Sassy*. Within the following seven business days, five major advertisers pulled out of the magazine (Van Meter, 1989).

The editors of *Sassy* were forced to reconsider future stories. It was a compromise editorially, but a necessity financially. Issues of the magazine following the boycott were tamer than before (Van Meter, 1989).

Never regaining its original voice, and further losing advertising support, *Sassy* was folded into *Teen* magazine in November, 1996. Christina Kelly, former editor of *Sassy*, says "*Teen* talked down to its readers, and implied the 'teenage girl was dumb. . . She cared only about clothes, makeup, and boys, but (the editors foolishly and dangerously reasoned) she did not have sex, drink, or experiment with drugs" (Kelly, 1997, p. 96). Kelly continues, "By contrast, *Sassy* was meant to be real and honest. We knew the average age of our readers was 16, which coincided with the average age at which girls became sexually active. We also knew that incest was an all too frequent tragedy, and that some of our readers were gay" (1997, p. 96). Former *Sassy* publisher Sandra Yates defends *Sassy's* honesty, discussing the need to educate girls about AIDS and contraception. "America has the highest teenage-pregnancy rate (and the highest abortion rate) of all industrialized

countries. That alone. . . is justification for *Sassy's* existence" (Van Meter, 1989, p. 16).

Sadly, by abandoning its own identity, *Sassy* fell victim to many of the same pressures faced by young women — conformity, popularity, peer pressure. If magazines are not offered the opportunity to take a different direction than the norm, how can we expect that opportunity for readers?

### **Other Themes of Identity Development and Achievement**

Another focus of features, in addition to fashion and beauty, was celebrities and entertainers. When the celebrities or entertainers profiled were women, the article's focus was often their wardrobes and beauty routines, and when the subjects were males, the focus was often what attracts them to women. So again, content suggests fashion and beauty are of utmost importance. How would readers react to learning about the training and practice these entertainers put in before they become famous?

Another problem with focusing on celebrities and entertainers, instead of other people with more mainstream careers, is presenting readers with limited choices for careers. What would be the effect if girls were presented with strong female role models who are scientists, engineers, and accountants instead of singers and actresses? Would girls then be more likely to pursue such careers? Psychologists cite adolescence as the time for vocational direction—a time when adolescents begin to make some possible career choices (Marcia, 1980). If readers were presented with more information

about education and career, they would have more choices and opportunities to explore.

Other identity-related features concerned heterosexual relationships, as was the case in the 1988 study. There was only one feature article, "It's Who I Am" (*Seventeen*, November, 1996) about homosexual relationships.

Psychologists believe adolescence is the time for relationship formation (Marcia, 1980). Yet almost exclusively, the only relationships discussed in these magazines are girls relationships with boys. What about features exploring friendships, peer pressure, cliques, changing to a new school and having to make new friends? Friendship is probably the most significant relationship for teenage girls, yet friendship was not a focus of any of the magazines analyzed.

Another issue of significance for adolescents, according to psychologists, is family (Marcia, 1980). There was little, if any, discussion of family relationships in the magazines analyzed. Yet this topic is important, particularly with the status of many American families. As there are more divorces, more children are trying to cope with parents dating, step-parents, step-families and joint custody.

As Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner found, there was also almost no discussion of political and international issues. Society is becoming more global, thanks to rapidly developing technology. What information do girls need in order to better function in this new society? How much of that information should be presented in teen magazines? Are teen magazines

simply entertainment, therefore not the market for heavy-hitting global and political issues? Or are the magazines a vehicle of information for readers, with a responsibility to provide readers with important information?

One development in articles since the 1988 study is an inclusion of a "fitness info" column in YM magazine. The column provides workout and exercise information. Several of the columns in the magazines studied, however, used a majority of the column to present new fashions to wear while exercising, and only the remainder of the column for actual fitness information. As the importance of exercise and a healthy diet is stressed by health experts, should teen magazines be presenting more of this information to readers so they develop a healthy lifestyle at an early age?

### **Bias for White Models**

The third conclusion Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner made in their 1988 study is "the bias for white models in advertisements and other photographic features in this sample collection of magazines" (1991, p. 113). The results of the analysis of the thirty magazines from 1996 to 1997 show some progress in this area. In the 1988 study, non-white models were approximately 10% of the total model presence. In 1997, non-white models accounted for 16.46% of models in *Sassy*, 17.7% of models in YM, and 20.7% of models in *Seventeen*.

Many teen's and women's magazines are following the trend found in the three magazines analyzed for this study, and are concerned about

presenting a multicultural, multi-racial look in beauty and fashion. So more models today represent minority groups.

Despite the increase of the percentage of non-white models in the magazines, there are still concerns about the models used in the magazines analyzed. Models are still extremely thin, and some are made-up with dark make-up smudged under their eyes and hair straight and stringy, the currently popular "drug-look" for models. No plus-sized models were observed in any of the magazines.

Magazines such as *Glamour* occasionally feature articles about attractive fashions for the large woman, but this is not enough. Although magazines are a business, and the advertisers in the health, beauty and fashion industries must make profits, a more ethical balance between profit and responsibility must be found. If girls and women are going to feel comfortable with their bodies, magazines need to make use of a wide variety of models in all shapes and sizes in regular articles and fashion spreads, not just special sections.

The only models who deviated from popular styles of dress and hair-styles were students featured in *Seventeen's* recurrent column "school zone." The magazine includes pictures of students from a different high school each month. The students featured are generally outside the norm for clothes and make-up, with pierced lips, noses and eyebrows, dyed hair, and extreme clothing. The message seems to be if you don't want to look like a model, then you must take being a non-conformist to the extreme. And even then,



you should look like all the other non-conformists.

Girls and women need to be judged on the basis of their accomplishments, not their appearance. It is only when women are truly valued as important contributors to society on the basis of their talents, intelligence and abilities that images of beauty will not have the power to control.

## Chapter VII. For Further Study

Further studies might look at the social conditions under which teen magazines are read, and also consider uses and gratifications theory to help explain why teen magazines are read. Kubey and Larson did such a study looking at music videos, video games and videocassettes (1990). Both the social conditions under which magazines are read and the reasons why girls read these magazines may influence the impact the magazines have on readers.

For example, if girls get together to look at teen magazines, then group membership theories might influence the impact of the messages. According to group membership theory, the ability of readers to discuss magazine content makes the messages particularly effective.

Many studies show the impact of group membership on the choices of individual members of the group. For example, in a study by Kurt Lewin (1958), housewives were more likely to prepare unusual cuts of meat when they were presented the information in a group and were able to discuss problems they would face preparing the meat, than when they were lectured only. Even greater effectiveness was shown for a group like this two to four weeks after the group meeting.

Klapper (1960) supports group discussion benefits because he believes that intra-group discussion "probably increases the likelihood of given members' being aware of sympathetic media offerings" (p. 29). In fact,

Klapper says that highly successful persuasive campaigns "have urged or demanded that the faithful listen to reinforcing media offerings in groups" (p. 29) because groups reinforce ideas through inter-personal influence and opinion leadership. *The Fine Art of Propaganda* lists band wagon as one of the seven common devices of propaganda. This band wagon approach suggests to the receiver that all the members of a group to which the receiver belongs are taking the same action (Severin & Tankard, 1992, p. 103).

Muzafer Sherif (1958) studied the effects of a group using autokinetic effects with a dark room and a small light, which seemed to move erratically, even though it didn't move at all. Sherif used two situations: one in which the subject was alone with the experimenter and one with a group of subjects. When studied individually, each subject established a range of movement particular to that individual. Sherif then brought the individuals to a group situation. When completing the experiment as a group, the results converged. Many of the subjects reported that they were not influenced by the group, even when results clearly showed they were. Even when group members were tested individually later, they tended to remain with averages their groups had established earlier.

Asch conducted a study of group pressure on the decision-making process by forming groups of eight male college students and having the members look at lines and match the length of a given line with one of three unequal lines. The judgments were announced publicly. Seven of the eight students were working with Asch and reported an incorrect answer. Seventy-

six percent of the true subjects yielded to group pressure and gave the wrong answer at least once (Asch, 1958).

If girls are reading teen magazines with their friends, how much more powerful are the messages they are receiving from those magazines? Or, if girls are reading the magazines alone, and then later discussing the contents, does this serve to reinforce the messages they read? Do the magazines serve a social function for these girls if they are sharing the experience by reading together and discussing what they have read? If girls are discussing the magazines, what are their reactions? Do readers agree with the editorial, or are do they take issue with some of the topics?

The choice of endorsers, or characters, for the magazine articles and ads is aligned with the group membership theory (Wulfemeyer & Mueller, 1992). Teens have a strong need to identify with their peer group, making these characters, or endorsers, effective for many readers. What impact, then, do the models and people presented in the articles have on the readers? If all the models are very thin, do average-weight readers have a distorted perception of themselves? Do heavy readers feel alienated or unacceptable because of their weight? For other readers, having a magazine full of teens may be a positive influence because they are provided with people with whom they can identify. Further research regarding the roles and impact of the people included in teen magazines could address some of these issues.

As more magazines include minority models, another study that might further understanding of the impact of such models on reader self-

image, is to look at the complexion and facial features of minority models, particularly African-American models. Keenan found blacks in advertisements have lighter complexions and more Caucasian-like features than blacks shown in editorial photographs (1996). Another approach would be to study how minority readers view the minority models included in teen magazines.

Other areas for future study might include the development of surveys that assess reader self-image before and after looking at models in teen magazines. Such a study could help determine the impact of models.

Another study might assess the dieting and eating disorders for readers versus non-readers. If there were a higher incidence of dieting and eating disorders for readers, this would only show a correlation between reading teen magazines and having an eating disorder or propensity to diet, not show causality. If there were a correlation, further studies might be developed to attempt to determine causality.

Uses and gratifications theory could be explored by studying the time spent on various sections of the magazines. Are there patterns that emerge for different groups of readers? Such a study would probably interest magazine publishers as much as researchers.

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